

Greenwood-Phinney Ridge

PROFILE

Greenwood-Phinney Ridge is an urban village that spans two communities joined by an arterial. The Greenwood and Phinney Ridge communities came together to plan for a Residential Urban Village, defined by the commercial areas along Greenwood Avenue between 65th Street and 92nd Street, and along 85th Street between 6th Avenue NW and Fremont Avenue N. Greenwood, to the north, was developed in the early 20th century as the northernmost streetcar suburb of Seattle. At its heart is a vital commercial district with buildings dating to the late 1920s. The land north of 85th Street was not annexed to the City of Seattle until 1954. Most of the area was developed prior to annexation and not to City standards. Consequently, the quality of infrastructure is generally lower than south of 85th Street. Phinney Ridge, which has been part of the city since the late 1800s, developed about the same time as Greenwood. It enjoys better views and includes the Woodland Park zoo, a 91-acre property, toward the south end of the neighborhood. Although over the years they have been home to some light industrial uses, Phinney Ridge and Greenwood have historically served as residential communities providing housing for residents employed in other parts of the city.

Although joined by an arterial which defines both of their neighborhoods (Greenwood Avenue becomes Phinney Avenue south of 66th Street), the communities have faced different issues. For example, parts of the Phinney community have historically been concerned with impacts from the zoo. The Greenwood community north of 85th, on the other hand, has been concerned with a lack of formal sidewalks and drainage. The topography ranges from the crest of Phinney Ridge on the south end, one of Seattle's highest points, to a flatter east-west profile near 85th.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

Phinney residents and businesspersons asked to join Greenwood in neighborhood planning for fear of losing out on City-funded improvements if their area wasn't included in an urban village. (The City had originally proposed that the southern boundary of the village be at N 80th St.) Single-family homeowners, meanwhile, wanted to participate in planning the urban village, but did not want their properties to be in the village for fear that they would be "up-zoned" to allow more intensive uses. After long debates that at times threatened to derail the planning process, the neighborhood plan proposed an urban village that incorporates only commercial or multifamily-zoned land along the main arterials and takes a cruciform shape. Many of the key strategies in the neighborhood plan focus on these arterials. Other strategies focus more attention on the needs of the single-family areas outside of the urban village boundaries.

One of the key strategies of the plan was to support a "town center" in the blocks surrounding the intersection of Greenwood Avenue North and North 85th Street. According to the plan, it "seeks to build upon what exists, to support the existing



businesses and preserve the strong existing mix of businesses, building character and other positive qualities.” Among the tools to be used to meet these goals are:

- A master plan for the Greenwood Town Center;
- A historic building/facade conservation program in the neighborhood;
- Design guidelines to support the preservation of the old buildings at the intersection of 85th and Greenwood;
- A transit hub at the town center and enhanced bus service;
- Improved parking opportunities in the neighborhood; and
- Exploration of a number of sites for the siting of a replacement for the existing library.

Another goal was to build Greenwood and Phinney Avenues and North 85th Street into “Main Streets” that enhance the quality of life in the neighborhood. In order to fulfill this vision, the neighborhood plan calls for the following actions:

- A corridor plan and design guidelines for Greenwood and Phinney Avenues;
- Reconstruction of the entrance to the Phinney Neighborhood Association building at N. 67th Street and Phinney Avenue North;
- Protection of public views in the neighborhood.

The neighborhood also sought new green spaces, parks and recreation facilities under a set of activities called “Put the green back in Greenwood and Phinney Ridge.” These activities include:

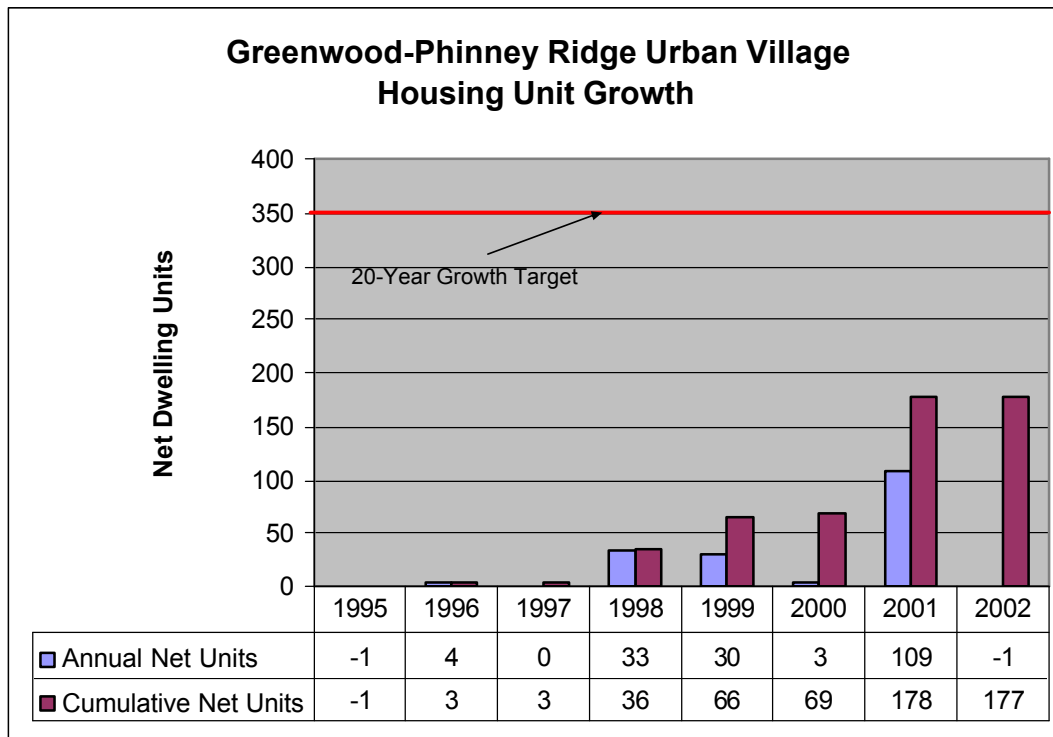
- Creating a new community recreation facility in conjunction with the existing Boys & Girls Club;
- Redevelopment of the Phinney Neighborhood Association site to include additional green space;
- New parks at North 87th Street and Evanston Avenue North, on property previously used for commercial greenhouses, and at a surplus City Light substation Northwest 76th Street and 6th Northwest;
- Identification of additional vacant parcels that might be appropriate locations for open space or park use;
- Extending the Interurban regional bicycle/pedestrian trail through the neighborhood, and adding additional bike routes through the neighborhood;
- Street tree planting and the development of landscaped medians;
- Designation and development of “green streets” in the neighborhood; and
- Improvements to the ecological health of Pipers Creek.

Another set of activities focused on enhancing transportation mobility within the neighborhood, and improving connections to regional centers. Among the tools proposed were:

- Adding traffic calming devices and pedestrian amenities to implement traffic calming plans developed by the Greenwood neighborhood and the Phinney Ridge neighborhood in 1995; and
- Improvements to the intersection of 50th and Aurora.

GROWTH

Through the end of 2002, Greenwood-Phinney has made solid progress toward its housing target of 350 dwelling units, adding 177 units, or 51% of the target, from 1995 through 2002. In addition to the units already built, new buildings with another 243 units have received building permits and are either currently under construction or are waiting for a stronger economy to start construction. If all of these buildings are completed, the neighborhood will exceed 120% of its twenty-year growth target.



As a residential village, Greenwood-Phinney has no job growth target, but job growth in the village has been higher than growth rates elsewhere in the city: up 26% between 1995 and 2001 to 1,680 jobs.

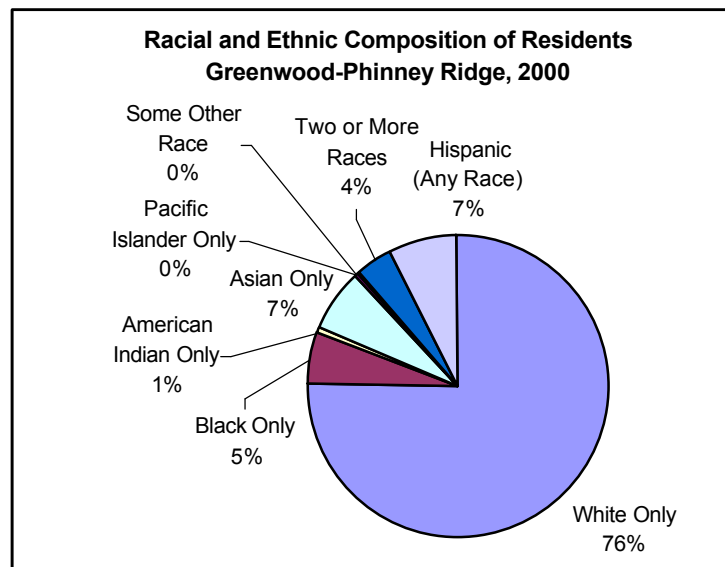
According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the village's population rose 14% in the 1990s, to a new total of 2,300 residents in 2000. However, Census data must be treated carefully in Greenwood-Phinney Ridge. The Census reports on areas that are at least a block in size, and do not match the long thin strip that characterizes the residential urban village boundary. Thus, any census data will include some of the households located in the single family areas that share the block with the residential urban village, but are not included in the urban village boundaries.

In the early 1990s, as home prices rose in Seattle, Phinney and Greenwood's housing remained relatively affordable. Prices were low in part because Phinney was thought to be out of the way with poor access except through other neighborhoods. In recent years people have taken advantage of moderate prices and enjoyed the housing types and views. Greenwood's housing has been more affordable due to its lack of views and lack of formal sidewalks north of 85th St. Growth in housing prices in Greenwood have lagged behind the inflation of Phinney's. More recently, families with children have found Greenwood especially affordable and enjoyed both good access to Aurora Avenue and a wide range of shopping, restaurants and services. Forty-one percent (41%) of the growth of households in the village came from households with children, much higher than the 3% across all urban villages. Again, some of this growth may have occurred in single family areas adjacent to, but outside, the urban village.

DIVERSITY

The Greenwood-Phinney Ridge village is less diverse racially and ethnically than the rest of the city, but people of color are moving into the neighborhood. Including the Hispanic population, people of color accounted for 25% of the population in 2000. In 1990 only 15% of Greenwood-Phinney Ridge's population were people of color. The African American population has quadrupled, (from 33 African-Americans in 1990,) but their proportion is still just 5% of the total population. Hispanics, Asians, and other racial groups had smaller increases (and collectively account for 20% of the population).

Census data shows that Greenwood-Phinney's range of household types is more similar to the rest of the city than to other urban villages. Seventeen percent of households in the village contain children and 17% contain seniors. Citywide averages are 19% and 20% respectively. The number of households with children grew 23% but the number with seniors fell 38%. Both of these changes were greater than the city's changes overall.



Increased diversity in the population can be explained in small part to the opening of Denice Hunt Homes, a Low Income Housing Institute project that is home to 30 households, many of them with children and many African-American. Furthermore, the single-family character and reasonable commute times have added to the attraction for young families to move into the area. Also, more generally, Seattle as a whole is becoming more integrated, with people of color finding housing across the City including historically white neighborhoods in north Seattle.

A VARIETY OF HOUSING TYPES BUILT TO APPROPRIATE SCALE.

After much debate, the neighborhood defined Greenwood-Phinney Ridge's urban village boundaries to include only commercial and multi-family areas. Consequently, housing types within the village fall into a few, similar, categories. In the northeast sector of the neighborhood, are a number of multifamily buildings and mixed-use buildings with small commercial spaces and a residential feel. This area has seen most of the new residential development in the village, with four-story multifamily structures replacing one-story commercial buildings and parking lots.

These new buildings are especially prominent along 85th. Community members fear a "tunnelization" effect along 85th as sites with one- to two-story commercial structures are redeveloped with four-story mixed-use buildings. Similar development further south along Greenwood Avenue has also been a concern for many people. The concern arises from 40-foot commercial areas along Greenwood Avenue located next to single-family zones. The steep slope along Greenwood creates a potential difference of twenty feet or more in building height between adjacent parcels. The City's design review program appears to have helped create appropriate transitions between adjacent buildings on the few projects that have been built in the narrow commercial zones along Greenwood Avenue, south of 85th.

The neighborhood has a range of housing affordability. Census data shows the home ownership rate in the blocks including the village was 36% in 2000, slightly higher than in 1990 and much higher than the average of 20% across all urban villages. The Denice Hunt Homes provide 30 subsidized townhouses for large families. After a contentious permitting process, this project has been well-received by neighbors since it opened in 1999. Another subsidized housing project on Northwest 85th Street recently went through the City's permit review process with strong neighborhood support. Affordable market-rate housing is found in existing apartment buildings in multifamily zones north of 85th. Because they lack some of the amenities found in new buildings, these older buildings are expected to stay affordable for some time. They are big enough and built recently enough that they are not likely to be redeveloped.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL AREAS

Because the commercial and multifamily zones in the village are often only one lot deep, the single-family neighborhood seems knitted into the commercial area south of 85th and north of 90th Streets. In addition, most new projects in the town center and along the main street include residential units, further integrating the commercial and residential areas. During the neighborhood planning process, residents said that they walked from the south end of the village (65th Street) to the core of the village at 85th Street to shop and dine.

However, the residential and commercial areas are not integrated throughout the neighborhood. Residents north of 85th often complain that a lack of sidewalks in their neighborhood makes it unsafe for them to walk to the village's commercial areas, creating a mental if not physical separation between the areas. This is slowly changing, new buildings are required to put in sidewalks in front of their buildings. But as these new sidewalks are built, they have raised their own controversies. Each new building can only be required to put in sidewalks in front of its building, meaning that the sidewalk

network, while expanding, remains a patchwork. Community members have been working with the City to develop new sidewalks north of 85th and are currently exploring innovative approaches that may lead to new partnerships among the residents, property owners and City agencies.

VIBRANT, PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED COMMERCIAL AREAS

The Greenwood-Phinney Ridge neighborhood plan focused on two overlapping commercial areas: the “main street” and the “town center.” The commercial corridor along Greenwood and Phinney Avenues is an older commercial strip that, as the neighborhood plan describes it, “ebbs and flows.” In some areas it has an almost residential character with mixed-use/multifamily structures and churches. In other areas it has a decidedly commercial character with concentrations of retail stores and restaurants. Some segments along Greenwood and Phinney appear fairly stable, with long-term businesses and little recent development but the blocks between around North 85th Street and North 87th Street on and to the east of Greenwood have seen the most recent development. A few projects have recently been completed along Greenwood, south of 80th Street.

The “town center” at Greenwood Avenue and 85th Street has become considerably more vibrant in the last 8 years. Pedestrian activity has increased along with the pedestrian-friendliness of the streetscape, realized through sidewalk improvements implemented by Seattle Transportation, pedestrian lighting from Seattle City Light, new trees coordinated through the Department of Neighborhoods, and attention to pedestrian crossings. More retail and office spaces are filled than several years ago, and new mixed-use buildings are springing up along 85th and Greenwood. Businesses seem more successful, or at least there appears to be less turnover. This area enjoys a full mix of stores, including two grocery stores, pharmacies, and a Fred Meyer. In spite of redevelopment in other parts of the “town center” the signature older buildings at the intersection of 85th and Greenwood, which define the intersection, and in some ways the community, remain.

The community, property owners and the City are cooperating to create a conceptual plan for a “town center” redevelopment for the northwest sector of the village. This area, encompassing businesses along Greenwood, and the commercial blocks north of 85th and west of Greenwood, is currently a large auto-oriented area containing a Bartell Drugs store, the Greenwood Market grocery store and a Fred Meyer. The plan has the following objectives:

- Create a mixed-use plan that will implement the neighborhood plan’s vision through redevelopment.
- Determine how redevelopment can support infrastructure improvements (parking, sidewalks, traffic control, etc).
- Include public participation so that all stakeholders can support the plan.
- Physically connect the pedestrian environment of Greenwood Avenue with the auto-oriented commercial area to the west to create a strong link between the two areas.

- Optimize parking availability for patrons of the commercial core and minimize the visual impacts of surface parking lots.
- Maintain the character of the neighborhood while integrating future development scenarios.

The plan takes a market-oriented approach to the redevelopment of the area. It provides real estate data to determine the best mix of uses in the area and transportation studies to identify the transportation improvements to support the redevelopment of the town center.

As is common in the residential urban villages, the employment profile shows a predominance of retail jobs which grew 19% from 1995 to 2001. Since these are smaller commercial areas, it's assumed that most people who live here work outside the village.

Although most of the commercial area's buildings are the same as in 1994, there has been some significant development in the "town center." Redevelopment of the Safeway at 87th and Greenwood began in 2002. Safeway's plan for its proposed superstore in Greenwood is designed to make the building more pedestrian-friendly. The new store will be oriented with the building at the front of the lot on Greenwood Avenue, rather than set back from the street behind a large parking lot. Safeway agreed to changes that will discourage traffic from cutting through the residential neighborhood to the east.

Across the street to the southwest of the Safeway project is one of the neighborhood's first significant mixed-use structures. The "Towers at Greenwood" continued the Greenwood retail streetscape north along the west side of Greenwood. Although the ground-floor retail space took time to lease up, the building has contributed to an active streetscape.

Certainly neighborhood commercial areas benefited from the economic boom of the 1990s. People in Greenwood-Phinney also credit a "Main Street" streetscaping project for improving the



Greenwood's "Town Center" (Northeast corner of Greenwood and 85th)
Courtesy of Heartland/GGLO

comfort and appeal of the commercial core. New pedestrian lights, street trees, and flower baskets have been installed in the commercial area as part of this project. The small parcels along Greenwood Avenue have been a double-edged sword: small parcels tend to stunt redevelopment, as developers want large parcels to make their projects (especially mixed-use projects) “pencil out.” On the other hand, those small parcels may have saved some of the historic commercial buildings, and retained space for smaller locally-owned businesses, which have proven attractive to neighborhood residents.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND OPEN SPACE WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE OF THE CORE

On the whole, progress towards providing community facilities and open space in the neighborhood has been notable. But Greenwood-Phinney Ridge’s experience shows how much work it takes to provide facilities alongside growth.

Greenwood Elementary is within walking distance of the business core, and just reopened in September after a full-scale renovation. Attendance by local children may help strengthen the community, but this is not among the schools offering community meeting space. Just north of 85th and Greenwood is a Neighborhood Service Center, providing connections between the community and City government. The closest community centers are Green Lake to the east and Loyal Heights to the west.

A new Greenwood library is currently undergoing design and review. After a contentious debate over the appropriate location for the new library, it will be located at the site of the current library (81st and Greenwood). Many community members wanted the library to relocate closer to 85th and Greenwood, while other community members favored the current site. Faced with a potentially more difficult mixed-use project at a new site, the library board decided to build on the existing site. While the site is still within walking distance of the “Town Center,” this decision missed an opportunity to further the City and neighborhood goals of providing community facilities to enliven the core of the urban village.

The neighborhood has had a deficit of park facilities, but significant progress is evident with the imminent addition of new parks. The only existing park accessible to the village was Sandel Playground in the northwest sector. It had been considered neglected by the City and frequented by drug dealers and prostitutes. In response to these concerns, a group of “Friends and



Design for the new Greenwood Park

Neighbors of Sandel Park” formed to plan for future improvements to the park and has created a successful summer concert series as a tool for bringing people to the park. These concerts in combination with street improvements around the park are credited with making the environment there more attractive to legitimate users.

Although Woodland Park and Green Lake are accessible to residents at the south end of the neighborhood, no park space existed elsewhere in the village. After years of work by community members, a new Greenwood Park is under construction northeast of the village on the site of former greenhouses northeast of the village. Before the neighborhood plan had been adopted, the Greenwood community convinced the City to buy the greenhouses site in 1999. In order to ensure that their project would be one of the first development projects funded through the 2000 Pro-Parks Levy, the neighborhood applied for a City Neighborhood Matching Fund grant to support a collaborative design for the park. This has enabled the community to keep the parks project moving forward, rather than waiting for Pro-Parks funds to be allocated for design of the park. The community has continued to raise funds for the park development project, and over \$300,000 outside of the Pro-Parks levy has been raised.

Other neighborhood open space projects include the acquisition of the old Whittier Substation from City Light, which has been approved for Pro Parks Opportunity Funding. An undeveloped parcel at the corner of Linden Avenue and 67th, down the hill to the east from the Phinney Neighborhood Center, was acquired in 2001 for park space. This site will become the “Linden Orchard” Park.

The neighborhood has also collaborated with the City and the Phinney Neighborhood Association to develop the “Heart of Phinney” project. This project took an undeveloped triangle outside of the Phinney Neighborhood Center at the south end of the village and developed a small open space and sitting area.

Greenwood-Phinney Ridge residents, and especially those who participated in neighborhood planning,

believe that the urban village strategy and neighborhood planning were a “bargain,” in which the community accepted growth they might not have welcomed, in exchange for certain infrastructure improvements and amenities. Thus, they have stayed very active to make sure that the library expansion, parks, and street improvement projects are carried out.



“Heart of Phinney” at North 67th St. and Greenwood Avenue North.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR SERVICES, ACTIVITIES, AND INTERACTION

As a result of the neighborhood planning process, the Greenwood and Phinney Ridge communities are now collaborating and join forces with the business community on issues of common interest. Partnerships and neighborhood plan stewardship are evident in the 18 Neighborhood Matching Fund projects, valued at over \$451,000. Parks projects especially have brought community members together. The community's park projects, Greenwood Park, Sandel Park, and the Linden Orchard park have relied on members of different parts of the community coming together to create a new community facility. The summer concerts at Sandel Park were one innovative way of getting neighbors involved in and committed to the future of the park. At the free outdoor concerts, the "Friends and Neighbors of Sandel Park" provided opportunities for audience members to comment on their vision for the future of the park.

MOBILITY

Bus service in Greenwood-Phinney is satisfactory, especially to downtown (every 15 minutes in the off-peak hours) and between Crown Hill/Loyal Heights and the U-District (every 10 to 15 minutes). Service to Northgate runs every half hour during the day. Bike travel has improved with approximately four miles of bike lanes along Greenwood Avenue and North 78th Street.

The City has also improved mobility for motorized vehicles in the neighborhood. The intersection of 85th and Greenwood has been redesigned to support better vehicle flow. In addition, the City is seeking funds to synchronize the signals along N/NW 85th Street in Greenwood to support better traffic flow through the neighborhood. Community members are still concerned about traffic that takes side streets through the neighborhood in order to avoid the congestion on the east-west arterials.

Pedestrian facilities are still lacking in some sections of the neighborhood. Because it was developed before annexation to the City, the area north of 85th Street was built without curbs and sidewalks. Drainage ditches, a lack of sidewalks, and parked cars combine to force residents to walk in the street through this area to the village. With some traffic cutting through the neighborhood to avoid congested arterials, pedestrians feel unsafe on their residential streets.

The neighborhood has been fairly successful at lobbying the City for scarce funds for sidewalks. For example, experimental walkways made out of colored, stamped asphalt are being tested along 87th Street. Sidewalks have been constructed along Greenwood



Much of the residential neighborhood north of 85th Street, lacks sidewalks and a formal drainage network.

north of the urban village. In addition, the City has built traffic circles to slow car speeds at a number of key intersections. However, most of the area north of the urban village still lacks sidewalks.

Pedestrian access across NW 85th can also be difficult. Shoppers and businesses complained when the Seattle Department of Transportation removed crosswalks at 85th and Palatine because the high traffic speeds and volume of vehicles had made pedestrian crossings unsafe. The City has since installed new pedestrian lights at the intersection.



Interviewees say that the City should do more about providing sidewalks in and near the Greenwood-Phinney Ridge urban village. They point out that this is a place where the City is encouraging more people to live and where the City has said that walking should replace cars for short trips.

COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Neighborhood planning created new partnerships in Greenwood-Phinney Ridge. Before neighborhood planning, the communities had not regularly worked together, and the residential community had not worked closely with the business community. Although the business community has long been organized as a “Greenwood-Phinney Chamber of Commerce” representing businesses along the length of Greenwood and Phinney Avenues, the residential communities have had distinct identities. The Phinney Ridge residential community has a long history of community identity and civic involvement. Greenwood’s was a wholly independent area until neighborhood planning. While certain projects reveal divided interests (e.g. library siting), the two neighborhoods typically work well together. The neighborhood has become more effective at lobbying the City for their interests. The combined efforts of two communities are probably part of the reason. Community members have stated that as a result of neighborhood planning, they now walk the 25-block length of the urban village and feel a stake in the entire village.

SUMMARY

Greenwood-Phinney Ridge has had strong growth. Many residential projects have received permits, including a new project for low-income households that will continue to improve the variety of housing in the village. The population is diversifying racially and ethnically, but not in household types or age. The commercial core area is considerably more vibrant than it was 8 years ago, having a full mix of shopping and services, busy sidewalks, and 15% more jobs than in 1995. Work on the Greenwood Town Center Plan and Main Street guidelines are already helping to shape development and the neighborhood streetscape in ways that will meet community goals.